

THE  
ANNUAL ADDRESS  
TO THE  
GRADUATING CLASS  
IN THE  
MEDICAL INSTITUTION OF YALE COLLEGE,

**January 15, 1852.**

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By ALVAN TALCOTT, M. D.,  
In behalf of the Board of Examiners.  
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ANNUAL ADDRESS

GRADUATING CLASS

MEDICAL INSTITUTION OF YALE COLLEGE

January 10, 1882.

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# ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN:—

As you are now about to enter upon the duties of an arduous and responsible profession, a few words of caution, of encouragement, and advice, on the part of the Board of Examiners, will not be deemed unseasonable or inappropriate.

You have arrived at an important era in your lives, a period to which you have long looked forward with some anxiety, and with not a little interest.

For months and years you have devoted your mental and physical energies to a course of study and discipline, to qualify yourselves for the profession of your choice. You have found by personal experience, that to be thoroughly qualified to perform its duties, and sustain its responsibilities, is no light matter.

That most wonderful piece of mechanism, the human frame, in comparison with which, viewed as a mere machine, the most finished efforts of art are coarse and bungling, has received your diligent and faithful study. The composition, form and structure, of each part and organ of the system; the offices and functions which they fulfill; and the wonderful sympathy of part with part, and organ with organ, are subjects with which you have rendered yourselves perfectly familiar.

You have investigated the bony frame-work, the foundation of the structure, giving form, and solidity, and proportion to



the whole, forming the levers and pivots of motion, and guarding important and delicate organs from injury. You have examined the various modes of articulation; you have seen the articulating surfaces tipped with cartilage, polished to a perfect smoothness, lubricated with the synovial fluid, and secured with ligaments firm, yet flexible, so that bone moves upon bone with an ease, a readiness, and a security, that art may strive in vain to imitate.

You have studied the muscles, that overspread this framework, constituting the moving power of the system, which by single or combined action, execute with faithfulness and precision the mandates of the directing mind. You perceive that from no visible cause, upon the mere exercise of volition, these muscles exert their contracting power and effect the desired movements, some of them with immense power, as the *gastrocnemii*, and some, as those of the fingers, or of the tongue, with almost inconceivable quickness.

You have studied the various parts of the circulating system, the heart with its separate cavities and its curiously constructed valves, and the arteries and veins which pervade the whole system like a net-work, so that the finest needle cannot penetrate a part where they are not found, bearing onward and returning that vital fluid the blood, from which every part of the system is built up, and its constant wastes repaired.

You have studied the nervous system, that electric telegraph, which with the speed of thought conveys sensations, both general and special, to that mysterious organ the brain, and bears back its mandates to every organ. You have studied the brain, the seat of thought, and intelligence, and reason, and of all those faculties which elevate man in the scale of being immeasurably above all the tribes of animals that people our world.

You have studied the digestive organs, which receive and elaborate the material that is to build up and renew the whole structure, the lungs that vitalize the blood by the action of the atmospheric air, and all the organs of supply and waste, of

secretion and excretion, that complete the wonderful machine, all working silently and without friction, from infancy to old age, with precise accuracy, with untiring perseverance, self-sustained and self-repaired.

The more careful and minute your examination of the structure of the human frame, the more are you struck with admiration at the wisdom and skill displayed by the Divine Architect, the wonderful adaptedness of each part and organ for its office, the delicacy and beauty of the workmanship, and the manifest design, conspicuous throughout the whole, to promote man's best enjoyment and his highest happiness.

Such is the regular and normal action of the animal machine, and this regular and normal action we designate by the term HEALTH. Good health is the greatest of earthly blessings, yet it is one of which we are least sensible, and for which we are least grateful, and whose value we never sufficiently prize till we lose it. We believe that a state of health is the condition natural to man, and in accordance with the design of God in his creation. We believe that health is the rule, and disease the exception. A thousand things must go right to constitute health, and a failure in any one of these may throw the whole system into disorder. We find in fact, that through man's follies, his faults, and his misfortunes, very few persons enjoy a state of uniform and perfect health. Few indeed are they who do not, at some period of their lives, suffer from the attacks of disease.

Hence you have studied the various forms of disordered action, the fevers of various grades and kinds that rage in the system, the inflammations that attack this or that part or organ, and all those maladies that befall the human race. You have seen how Consumption gnaws away the powers of life by slow and imperceptible degrees, and how Cholera melts them away like the mists of the morning; how the articulating tissues are racked by Rheumatism and Gout, and how the muscles in Palsy refuse to execute the mandates of the will; how Dropsy clogs the wheels of life by its profuse serous



effusions, and how Apoplexy reduces the whole system to a senseless yet breathing mass.

Accident and disease call up also beneath your view a long array of surgical disorders. A blow upon the head is followed by a state of complete insensibility, due either to the concussion which the delicate texture of the brain has received, or to pressure upon the brain from depressed bone or extravasated blood. A limb is dislocated, a bone is fractured, or a wound is inflicted upon the soft parts, and surgical skill is requisite to adjust and retain the injured parts in their proper places. An important artery is wounded, and life will be speedily exhausted by hemorrhage, unless the bleeding vessel is properly secured. A hernial tumor becomes strangulated, and speedy death ensues, unless surgical skill renders prompt and efficient relief. These are but specimens of hundreds of diseases, medical and surgical, which have passed under your scrutiny.

In order to qualify yourselves to controll and cure this long catalogue of multiform and varied disease, you have investigated the powers and properties of the various articles of the *Materia Medica*. You are not stinted in the selection of your remedial agents. The store-houses of nature and the repositories of art are all thrown open before you. From the garden, the field, and the forest; from the sea-shore, the valley, and the mountain; from the depths of the ocean, and from the bowels of the earth; from the icy regions of the poles, and from beneath the burning sun of the line; from the mart of commerce, and from the laboratory of art, are you to gather and collect the remedies that can counteract the various forms of disease. You are not the slaves of narrow prejudices, or hemmed in to the use of a few fanciful or inert remedies. In cases where nature is competent, unaided, to effect the cure, you are satisfied with the use of the simplest medicines. But when disease puts on a more severe and dangerous form, you have the sense and the skill to resort to more active medication, and to use what are called the heroic remedies. Those

mental faculties that have enabled man to harness the steam to his car, and to send the lightnings as his messengers to do his bidding, have also empowered him to select from all the kingdoms of nature, the agencies that will most happily counteract the diseases which befall mankind.

It is fashionable, as you are aware, in certain quarters, to discard the use of all active medication, and to adopt an utterly inefficient treatment as applicable to all cases of disease. That such a mode of treatment may in many cases be apparently successful we have no manner of doubt; but we think that while the practitioner gets the credit, it is nature that effects the cure. We have great confidence in the *vis medicatrix naturæ*, and we know that it sometimes effects cures in cases that were well nigh hopeless. In mild cases of disease it is often best to leave the case to nature, and this the judicious physician does. But is it safe to adopt this course in all cases? Can you trust it in Dysentery, in Spasmodic Cholera, or in Croup? You find that in many diseases the natural tendency is to death, and not to recovery. Our only hope lies in taking the case out of the hands of nature, and in placing our reliance upon the resources of art.

There exists in the minds of many a strong aversion to medicines from the mineral kingdom, as being something that is not congenial to the human system. Such persons do not reflect, we presume, that the bony frame-work of our system is composed almost entirely of mineral substances; that almost every organ and tissue of the body contains them as constituent principles, and that even the blood that courses so freely through our veins contains various mineral substances in solution, and even owes its rich color to iron. Scarcely can we name an article of food of which mineral substances are not component parts. They are found in the milk which the infant draws from the fountain of its mother's bosom—in the strong meat which is the food of the full grown man, and even in the bread which is the staff of life. Animal life could not be sustained were it otherwise. How long can health be maintained



without the use of salt? And how can the growth and renovation of all parts of the human system be carried on, without the ingestion of all those substances, mineral or otherwise, which form the elementary material of the different tissues?

The truth is, gentlemen, all articles that are possessed of active powers, be they of animal, or vegetable, or mineral origin, are susceptible of abuse. If used in appropriate cases, and in proper quantities, they may be safe and valuable remedies. If used in inappropriate cases, and in unsuitable quantities, they will be sure to do harm. To know when and how to use medicines of active powers, so as to secure their good effects, and at the same time to avoid any injurious results, is one important object in a system of medical education. Any body can prescribe *catnep tea*, and we have never heard of any harm produced by the prescription. But to use Prussic Acid, and Opium, and Antimony and Mercury, as safe and efficient medicines, requires some knowledge and skill. You may rest assured that those articles, be they vegetable or mineral, that cannot by any possibility, even if misapplied, do harm, will not in any probability do much good.

We have reviewed some of the fields you have passed over in your elementary course. Your intimate acquaintance with all these fundamental branches is indispensable to a sound medical education. These are the corner-stones upon which the superstructure must rest. Without a thorough and accurate knowledge of Anatomy, the practical Surgeon is like a barque without chart or compass. He will be paralyzed by doubt and uncertainty, irresolute and undecided in those sudden emergencies that break so unexpectedly upon our profession, and which make or mar a man's reputation at once—and expose to just censure and to merited reproach his incompetency for his station, leading all to conclude that he has mistaken his calling. Every competent surgeon must know at a glance, the situation, relative position, and importance, of every part implicated in any disease or accident, or exposed



in any operation, for the life of his patient may perhaps pay the forfeit of his ignorance in those particulars. And in practice more strictly medical, that physician only can prescribe with precision and effect, in disorders of internal organs, who thoroughly understands the anatomy and mutual relations of those organs, the nature of the tissues implicated, and the particular mode of termination which nature points out in each individual case.

Anatomy and Physiology are the grammar and dictionary of the profession, the first to be taken up by the learner, and the last to be laid aside. Endeavor, gentlemen, to be always posted up on these elementary branches, and the clearness and satisfaction which will result from this knowledge, as you pursue your daily rounds of practice, will be your constant and rich reward.

The progress of the age, no less than its own intrinsic importance, urges upon you a thorough knowledge of Chemistry. The researches of chemical analysis are throwing light upon many obscure points of medical practice. In many diseases we can ascertain, by a careful chemical analysis of the secretions and excretions, what function is impaired, and what elementary principle is in excess, or deficient; and we are thus directed with demonstrative certainty to the remedial measure that will neutralize the excess, or supply the deficiency. We know that the elements that compose the human system can only be derived *ab extra*, for the secreting and assimilating organs can select and modify, but they cannot create.

Let it ever be impressed upon your minds, that the profession of your choice is no sinecure. If you desire ease, and personal enjoyment, and elegant leisure, and expect to find these in the practice of the medical profession, you will surely find yourselves mistaken. If you are faithful to the duties of your calling, you must be ever at your post, and call no moment of your time your own. You must encounter the summer's heat and the winter's cold. You must not fear to face

the storm and the tempest. You must leave the downy pillow of repose when duty calls, though worn and weary, and suffer a night of fatigue to succeed a day of toil. You must forego the society of friends, and the pleasures of retirement, and of literary leisure, to minister to the wants of the sick and the suffering. And when pestilence stalks abroad in the land, and the very atmosphere is laden with death; when consternation is upon every countenance, and your fellow-citizens flee as for their lives; you must remain fearlessly at your post, and standing like Aaron "between the living and the dead," steadily and faithfully employ all the resources of your art to stay the plague. All the faculties of your minds, and all the powers of your bodies, must be taxed to the utmost, if you would fulfill with fidelity the duties of your calling.

In order to be successful in your profession, you must be hard students. Be not deceived with the idea, that since you are now admitted to the practice of the profession, your period of study is over. If you would be faithful to yourselves, and faithful to the trust committed to your care, you must never cease to be learners. Be familiar with the history of medicine, and especially of medical practice. Let the standard authors of the profession be your familiar companions :

Nocturnâ versate manu, versate diurnâ.

It was the quaint advice of an old physician to his pupil when commencing practice, "Be always found with a book under your arm." But be not so unwise as to adopt implicitly every principle advanced in the books you read. "Read," says Lord Bacon, "not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and debate, but to weigh and consider." Be familiar with all the new theories and new modes of practice, but bear in mind that not every innovation is an improvement. It is not very probable that the great principles of medicine, which like ancient landmarks have stood the test of time and experience for thousands of years, will be displaced or superseded by any one of the many new-fangled



theories of our day, which, like Jonah's gourd, "spring up in a night and perish in a night."

But bear in mind that the records of medicine are not your only round of study. Study disease as it occurs to your observation. Study constitution, and temperament, and epidemic influence, and all those causes, manifest or occult, which exert a controlling or modifying influence over disease. Study nature, and bend all your powers to be masters of the lessons she teaches, and interpreters of the signals she displays.

The cases of disease, which you will meet with in your professional rounds, will not be classified to your hand, as you find them in your books. They will not be labeled like the bottles on the apothecary's shelf. You will find cases that are obscure and masked, you will find those that are irregular and complicated, and all modified by a thousand circumstances of age, sex, condition, &c., which will demand your careful scrutiny. Study each case by itself, the seat and cause of the disease, the disorder of structure or of function which constitutes it, the grade of action, the nature and tendency of the disease, the modifying power of age, sex, constitutional temperament, or hereditary influence, the indications to be fulfilled in the treatment, and the proper selection of remedies to meet that individual case.

Ever bear in mind that a solemn responsibility rests upon you. In your hands, under God, are the issues of life and death. Under your care are placed the great men of the land, the pillars of church and state, on whom the great interests of society rest, and whose condition excites the anxious sympathy of thousands. All eyes are turned upon you; and the results of your treatment will be felt for weal or woe by multitudes. The father of a family is pressed down by a severe and dangerous disease, and a heart-stricken, anxious wife, and weeping children, are looking to you to save their only earthly support and stay. Man, in the flower of his age, and the full vigor of his strength, feels the paralyzing touch of disease, and finds that his strength is weakness, and turns to

you for succor. Woman, in the pride of her beauty, the admired of all eyes, and the loved of all hearts, whose dreams of the future were tinted and gilded with bright beams of happiness, now pale and trembling with disease, looks to you and the resources of your art, for restoration to health, and the realization of all her fondest hopes.

Enter with solemn earnestness, and with untiring zeal, upon the responsible work. Devote all the powers of your body, and all the energies of your mind, to the performance of your professional duties. Relieve the pains of bodily sickness, and minister the balm of hope and comfort to the "mind diseased." Stop the progress of disease that is making its fearful approaches to the citadel of life. Re-kindle the lamp of hope now well nigh extinguished. Restore a father, a mother, a wife, a child, to the embraces of loving and beloved friends. And in cases where recovery is impossible, and fatal disease is making its silent but resistless progress, you are to employ the resources of your art to give present relief and comfort to the languishing sufferer. You are to soften the couch and smooth the pillow of declining life by your care, your assiduity, your sympathy. And when the vital forces begin to fail, and hope itself goes out, cease not to fan the feeble flame, till from the necessity of nature, it at length flickers and expires.

It is in cases of this description that the feelings of the sensitive physician are most severely tried. If all cases of disease were amenable to our art, so that we could cure every malady we meet with, our profession would indeed be a most happy and desirable employment. The Savior of men went about when on earth, "healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease." But it is not so now. You will be called to the bedside of a patient, perhaps an old and tried friend—one to whom your heart is knit as to a brother. You perceive at a glance, that the attack is severe, and the danger imminent, and you hasten to administer the remedies which the case demands, but to your grief and disappointment, they fail of accomplishing the designed effect. You vary your



remedies, you call in all your resources, and exhaust all your skill, in your endeavors to meet the severity of the case, but the disease baffles your best directed efforts ; in spite of them all it makes its slow but steady progress, and the dreadful conviction settles upon you that your friend must die. You watch the ebbing current of life with painful interest. At length, the vital forces flag, and are ready to give up the contest. The mind is unsettled and wandering, the pulse becomes feeble and fluttering, the respiration is hurried and short, the eye grows dim, the damps of death gather on the brow—at length the breast ceases to heave and the heart to beat, and your friend is senseless in death. You close the glassy eyes of your beloved friend, and sit down and weep over the impotence of your art.

After all your study, your care, and your assiduity, you must not expect to be always properly appreciated. When you have conducted a case of severe disease with consummate skill, when you have met and counteracted every untoward symptom, when you have carried the patient through a lingering disease, and raised him, with the blessing of God, to a state of comfort and health, you must not be surprised to find yourself the object of malignant censure. Many an old lady will you meet with, who knows more of medicine and of medical practice than all the profession combined. If this or that remedial measure had been employed or omitted, the case, they think, would have been far better conducted. They have seen quite a number of cases precisely like the one in question, and this or that remedy cured them all forthwith.

You may have seen a patient in the forming stage of some severe disease, and by careful and judicious management, you may have broken up the disease at the commencement, and restored the patient to speedy health. Another practitioner may conduct a case precisely similar, with an inefficient course of treatment ; and the patient may in consequence, go through a distressing sickness of days' or weeks' duration, until a vig-

orous constitution overmasters both the disease and the treatment, and the patient gets well.

Now what is the verdict awarded by public opinion in the two cases. In the first, the judicious physician gets little credit for curing a patient who was really not very sick. In the other, the practitioner acquires much reputation for curing a very severe and dangerous disease. It is a truth of which all are not aware, that many a so-called great cure, is in fact, but a narrow escape.

The skillful practice of an educated physician is considered quite a matter of course; it excites no remark, and calls for no comment. He may treat hundreds of cases with skill and success, and the public are not aware that any great or unusual event has occurred. But if a case conducted under some new mode of treatment, should happen to have a favorable termination, a remarkable event has happened, and one which excites the attention of all; and the practitioner perhaps acquires at once a reputation for medical skill, which a long course of more quiet but equally successful practice would fail to give.

Were this false judgment confined to the lower orders of society, whose minds have not been trained to habits of nice observation, and who have not been taught to weigh evidence and make accurate discrimination, the case would be less surprising. But such is poor human nature, that many are to be found, who on other points are deemed sensible men, who will think that any one of large pretensions, though of slender acquirements, practicing some new -ology or -opathy, shall understand more of the nature of disease and of medical treatment, (and this too, perhaps, when he or she is asleep,) than those who have made it the study of their lives.

But such are not all. There are those who can appreciate true worth, and discriminate between the appearance and the reality. There are those who will still continue to believe that there is no "royal road" to medical, any more than to any other science, that we can know nothing without learning



it, and that to learn any thing truly valuable and important, requires persevering labor and study. That physician who shall pursue an upright and honorable course, who shall thoroughly understand his profession, and diligently dispense to all under his care, the results of his well-earned knowledge and skill, will not fail at length to secure the approbation and esteem of the intelligent and high-minded portions of the community. The way to acquire a sure and permanent reputation on any subject, is really to possess all the knowledge which that subject admits of, and to have at command all the resources which art has accumulated as applicable thereto. If you would have the reputation of a good surgeon or physician, *be* such in reality. Possess and exercise all the judgment, and knowledge and skill, which the various emergencies of life call for, and you cannot fail to obtain the public confidence, and an honorable standing in the community.

Be ever careful to sustain the dignity of your profession. Cultivate an *esprit du corps*. Never allow yourselves to speak lightly or disparagingly of the profession or of its members. Be on terms of friendship and good feeling with your professional brethren. Let all narrow-minded jealousy and petty selfishness be ever strangers to your breasts. Consider every member of the profession as your brother, and feel that to advance his interests is to promote your own. The world is wide enough for all of us. There is sickness and sorrow and suffering enough to tax the heads, and the hearts, and the hands of us all. Treat your seniors with respect and deference, your equals with manly frankness and a generous friendship, those who may enter upon the stage after you with courtesy and kindness. Bear in mind that the good opinion of your medical brethren gives you the best and the most enduring reputation, one that will far surpass that short-lived popularity that may be acquired by low acts of chicanery.

Endeavor to elevate the character of the profession. Be thorough masters yourselves of every branch of medicine and surgery and the kindred sciences. Be careful to keep pace

with the progress of science, and be always ready to avail yourselves of all improvements that are really such. Cultivate an acquaintance with general literature and science, so far as the pressure of professional duties will admit, and exemplify by your own bearing and standing in society, that your profession has just claims to be considered one of the liberal professions. Lift up your hands and your voices in favor of a thorough training, both literary and professional, of medical students previous to their being admitted to the practice of the profession. Be on terms of intimacy with your professional brethren. Communicate to them the results of your experience, and receive suggestions from them in return. Have no concealment or secrecy in your practice. If you have learned any thing that will be of essential service to your fellow-men, communicate it freely and let all share the benefit; and take a firm and decided stand against all who make use of secret remedies. Concealment and mystery may take with the multitude for a time, but they are beneath the dignity of an honorable profession, and can confer at best but a short-lived popularity.

Your station in life will give you influence in the community. Let that influence ever be exerted to sustain the best interests of society. Be ever found on the side of good order and good morals; be forward to sustain the interests of education and religion; and be patrons of every truly benevolent measure for relieving human suffering, and promoting human happiness.

Let me caution you to avoid mingling in party politics. If you value your own peace and comfort, or your success in your business, never condescend to be a political partisan, or a candidate for political office. Exercise your rights as a citizen, according to your views of duty, but shun bar-room harangues, and party caucuses. Be satisfied to let the burdens of public office fall upon those shoulders that are aching to receive them, and that will probably ache still harder in sustaining them.

\* *If this were insisted on how many graduates would there be in all the schools of this country*

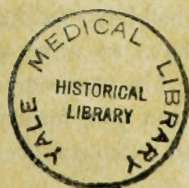


Be the decided friends of Temperance. Time was, when our profession was liable to the reproach of containing many intemperate members. Such we rejoice to believe is not the case now. That any well-informed physician, with the knowledge we have of the effects of alcoholic stimulants upon the bodily organs, and the mental manifestations, should use as a beverage, articles so fraught with mischief, is a matter of strange surprise. These articles have their uses as medicines in some forms of disease, but none for men in health. As you value good health, a healthful influence in society, a clear head, and a steady hand, abstain entirely from the exhilarating cup. Show to all, by precept and example, that the healthful play of the bodily and mental powers can be best secured, and best preserved, by habits of rigid temperance.

Go forth, gentlemen, into the strife and conflict of life: gird yourselves with armor of proof, and fight manfully the battles which will await you in many an untried field. Quit yourselves like men, and *deserve*, if you do not obtain, the laurels of honorable distinction. You are now about to enter upon the active duties of your profession. You see many that have entered the same field before you—some now in the strength and vigor of manhood, and some with brows furrowed by time, and heads frosted over with age. You will not, in the ordinary course of things, long continue the youngest members of your profession. Your predecessors will, one by one, close up their earthly labors, and retire from the field; and upon you will devolve the burden of responsibility and of duty. You will take the forefront of the battle; and may you act your part honorably and well, and leave your attainments, your example, and your influence, as a rich legacy to those that shall come after you.

And when at length you shall have finished your course, and disease which you shall have so often successfully encountered shall mark you for his prey—or when old age shall lay his withering hand upon you, may you be able to look back with satisfaction, and without regret, upon a life of

honorable usefulness and of active benevolence; and may you lay your heads down to die, cheered by the Christian's faith, and the Christian's hope, and enter with joy upon the untried realities of that world where sickness, and sorrow, and death shall never enter.



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